

people when sleeping; try not to use more than one pillow.

- Physiotherapy may be considered if the pain is not settling.

Do I need to see my doctor?

Not usually, your neck pain should improve over the next few weeks. But see your GP or return to the Emergency Department if:

- If you have numbness, pins and needles or weakness on one or both arms that has not improved after one week.
- Problems with your balance or walking.
- Loss of consciousness or memory loss since your whiplash injury.
- If the pain becomes worse and persists beyond 4-6 weeks.
- Blurred vision, ringing in your ears, or dizziness that does not go away within six weeks.
- Your injury has not improved within three months.

Reference sources

- **Neck Pain-whiplash injury**
<https://cks.nice.org.uk/neck-pain-whiplash-injury> (accessed 15/10/2015)
- **Whiplash Neck Sprain**
<http://patient.info/health/whiplash-neck-sprain> (accessed 15/10/2015)
- **Whiplash Injuries**
<http://www.nhsinform.co.uk> (accessed 15/10/2015)

Contact details

If you have you any other questions or problems please contact us.

Accident & Emergency Department

Telephone: 01483 571122 **ext** 2206

or contact your own GP or phone 111

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm
Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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Neck Pain – Whiplash

Soft Tissue Injury Accident & Emergency Department



Patient information leaflet

About the neck

The back of the neck includes the cervical spine. It is made up of seven vertebrae and the muscles and ligaments that surround and support it. The vertebrae are linked by facet joints and between each vertebra is a 'disc'. These discs act as shock absorbers and allow the spine to be flexible. The cervical spinal cord is protected by the spine. The nerves from the spinal cord come out between the vertebrae to take and receive messages to the neck and arms.

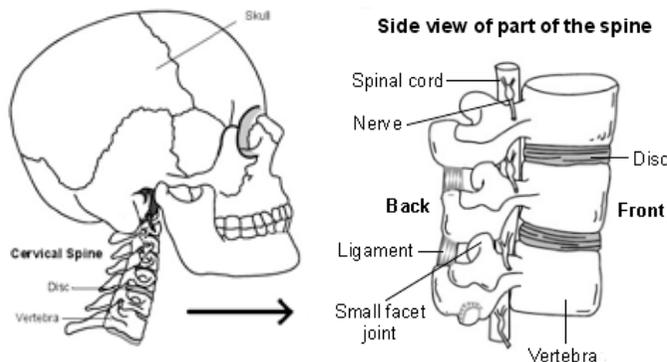


Image courtesy:
www.patient.co.uk/nonspecific-neck-pain

What is Whiplash?

Whiplash injury can occur when your head is suddenly jolted backwards and forwards, or forwards and backwards in a whip type movement, or is forcibly rotated. This can cause some neck muscles and ligaments to stretch more than normal. Neck pain and possibly other symptoms may be caused. This can be common when you are in a car hit from the behind, side or front but can also be caused by sports injuries, falls or assaults.

How is it diagnosed?

It is from a description of the way the accident occurred. From any symptoms that you are suffering, and when they commenced. And then from your examination. Whiplash injury can cause a serious neck injury i.e. damage to the spine but this examination of your neck and arms will check that there are no signs of damage to the vertebrae, spinal nerves or spinal cord. If these are suspected further tests may be recommended.

What are the symptoms?

- Pain and stiffness in the neck which may or may not refer to the shoulder or down the arms. There may be pain or stiffness in the upper or lower part of the back.
- These symptoms may take several hours after the accident to appear and can become worse on the day after the accident.
- You may have a reduced range of movement to your neck i.e. turning or bending it.
- Muscle spasms in your neck may occur.
- Headaches are also a common symptom.
- Dizziness, blurred vision, nausea and pain in the jaw, are less common and soon resolve.
- Some people feel tired and irritable for a few days.

What is the treatment?

You need to be reassured that this injury is self-limiting.

- It is advised that you have an early return to your normal activities.
- Exercise your neck and keep active, this will be painful but will not cause you damage. You must not let it 'stiffen up'. Gradually try to increase the range of neck movements. Every few hours gently move the neck in each direction, and do this several times a day.
- You may need painkillers to relieve the pain during the first few days. These could be over the counter medicines that you buy, such as Ibuprofen, Paracetamol or Co-codamol, or you may be prescribed separate Codeine or stronger Co-codamol. Please take the painkillers as advised/ prescribed by the doctor or nurse.
- Muscle relaxants may be prescribed for a few days if your muscles are tense or in spasm.
- Cold and heat may also help. Ice packs (i.e. frozen peas which can be reused as an icepack, but not for eating) should be wrapped in a damp towel and used for the first two days. Heat may be more relaxing after this. Hot water bottles should be covered and applied for ten to fifteen minutes at a time, three to four times a day.
- You should never wear a soft collar.
- Good posture can help, sit upright. A firm supporting pillow may help some